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GAME ANIMALS AND BIRDS DESTROYED BY FOREST AND GRASS FIRES

The spring fire season, which begins practically with the beginning of spring all through the Atlantic Coast region and the Mississippi Valley, is a time of hardship and disaster for early nesting birds of all kinds. Such birds depend upon the accumulation of natural growth for cover and for their feed during early spring before insect life develops.

It therefore can be seen, says Dr. E. W. Nelson, Chief of the Biological Survey of the United States Department of Agriculture, that to allow ranges to be swept by fire is injurious to both birds and small wild animals. As the litter and growth of the previous years become sufficiently dry to burn, it is the practice of many to set fire to it with the hope of improving the ranges and, in many cases, of ridding the lands of ticks. The Department of Agriculture has repeatedly stated that it is impossible to rid lands of ticks in this way, and it also has been shown that instead of improving ranges by burning the dry grass and leaves, such lands become gradually poorer each year, so that the growth which they can support is less and less vigorous and extensive. Many State foresters are particularly active at this time as such fires are destructive to forest growth as well as to wild life.

Everyone who is interested in the protection of wild life, says Doctor Nelson, should join in an effort to point out the loss from such fires, and to cooperate in every way to prevent them. Such effort is better based upon human contacts of a friendly sort, personal conversation, and informal visits to schools and talks to the pupils than on anything in the way of formal meetings and addresses. Visits to schools should have in view the enlisting of the aid and sympathy of the pupils in protecting not only the forests but the animals and birds as well. Fire fighting forces which have been developed through many of the States, and posters warning of forest fires, give salient facts as to purposes and results.

The fire prevention forces in the eastern Atlantic States, particularly of the southern region, can realize what they will be forced to face during the next few weeks from experiences of the last spring fire season. In one State from the period of January 1 to June 30, 1934, there were 760 fires which burned over a total of nearly 125,000 acres and did damage to the forests estimated at more than \$585,000--the figures being based upon the forest condition only, without reference to the damage to wild life. In many instances such birds as ducks, geese, turkeys, and grouse have been burned on their nests, with the destruction not only of the incubating birds, but of the clutches of eggs with all their prospects. Where fires occur before the nests have been located they often result in driving the birds from the localities burned and may thereby greatly decrease the number of young in any one section. Every effort should be made to prevent the occurrence of fires in such places.

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